South Bronx nonprofit offers ideas for youth out of detention

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When Demetria Frampton's grandson was caught in a fight with older boys at New Explorers High School in Concourse Village in September, some of the youth involved were immediately arrested.

But because her freshman grandson was only 15 years old, he was diverted to a burgeoning South Bronx non-profit called Community Connections for Youth (CCFY), started in 2009.

"I'm a big advocate for keeping kids out of the system," said Frampton, a retired Department of Corrections employee. "(My grandson) works out of Brook Park and has a mentor. I've seen a change in his attitude."

On Wednesday, members from CCFY were joined by a city Department of Probation deputy commissioner and a John Jay College of Criminal Justice professor to discuss ways the community can support dozens of youth slated to leave upstate detention facilities under Gov. Andrew Cuomo's "Close to Home" initiative.

"Shipping kids upstate at a cost of $270,000 a year has been an abject failure," said Ruben Austria, executive director of CCFY, at the Mott Haven Public Library. "We outsource the responsibility for kids getting in trouble to law enforcement or probation or jails."

Austria noted that adolescents and teenagers who are sent to standard court-mandated programs - for crimes like fighting in school and robbery - often lapse into trouble again.

"We want to get young people plugged back into the fabric of community life, and involved long-term in the neighborhood," he said, "with positive youth development activities lasting beyond the short-term mandate."

Clinton Lacey, the deputy commissioner, said that of the roughly 25,000 offenders on probation, about 9,000 are 16 to 24 years old.

He said probation officers are in the process of moving from central locations to sharing space with community-based organizations like CCFY.

"We think the people who can best serve our young people are those in the community," Lacey said.

But for youth like Rondell Pinkerton, arrested for allegedly fatally shooting Lloyd Morgan, it seems too late for the community to intervene.

"It's a very sad situation where you have a 17-year-old admitting to the fact that he fired shots where a 4-year-old was killed," Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly told reporters this week.

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